A Song for the Ravenous

Posted originally on the Archive of Our Own at http://archiveofourown.org/works/57661930.

Rating:	Explicit
Archive Warning:	Graphic Depictions Of Violence
Category:	M/M
Fandom:	Hannibal (TV)
Relationship:	Will Graham & Hannibal Lecter
Characters:	Hannibal Lecter, Will Graham, Jack Crawford, Rinaldo Pazzi, Alana Bloom, Mason Verger, Bedelia Du Maurier, Beverly Katz, Brian Zeller, Jimmy Price
Additional Tags:	Hannigram - Freeform, Top Hannibal Lecter, Blood Kink, Canon-Typical Violence, Young Hannibal Lecter, Young Will Graham, Il Mostro, Chesapeake Ripper, jack crawford really cannot with these two idiots, Will Graham & Beverly Katz Friendship, immortal Hannibal Lecter, immortal mason verger, no betas we die like my sanity, Sex, Anal Sex, blowjob, Rough Sex, Hurt/Comfort, Kidnapping, Hannibal kidnaps will, Crossdressing
Language:	English
Series:	Part 13 of Hannigram
Stats:	Published: 2024-07-25 Updated: 2024-10-01 Words: 11,295 Chapters: 4/?

A Song for the Ravenous

by Metaphysicalash

Summary

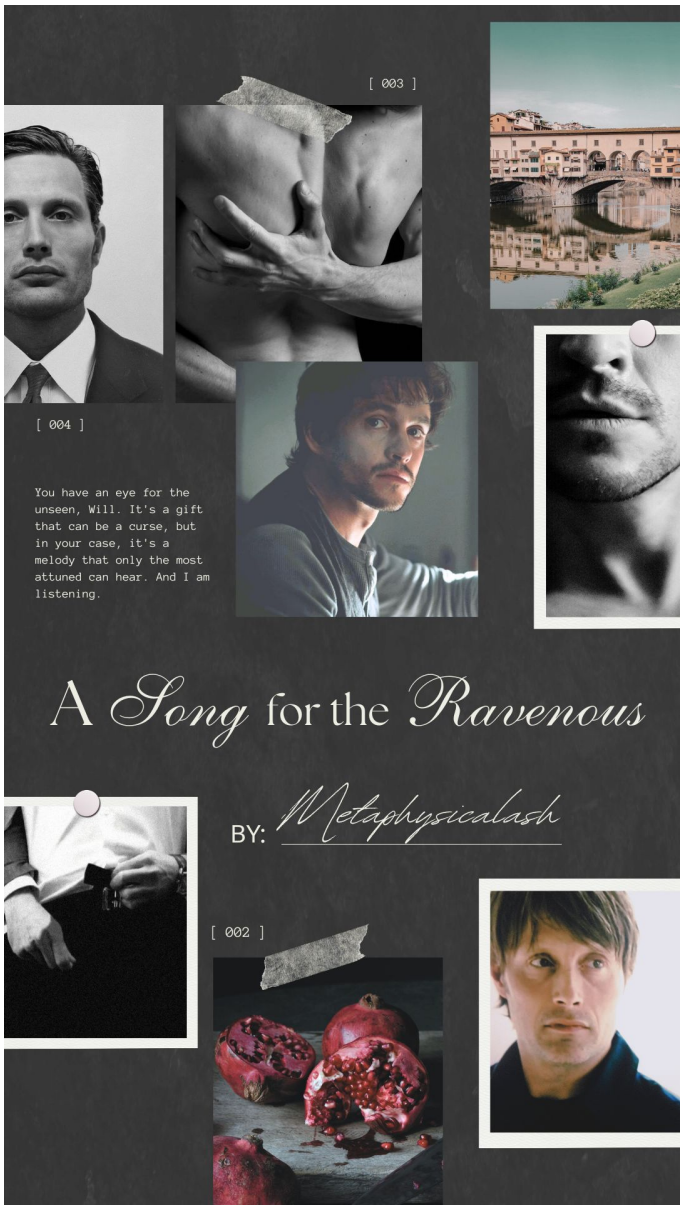
> "You have an eye for the unseen, Will. It's a gift that can be a curse, but in your case, it's a piece of music that only the most attuned can hear. And I am listening."
>
> ---
>
> 1997 Florence.
>
> For an immortal like Hannibal, he has little to worry about. He literally can't be killed, so that allows him to play things close to the vest. But when young Will Graham—who's not supposed to be in Florence, but gets dragged along by Jack because of his particular empath abilities—Hannibal sees someone who's potentially a match (romantically and otherwise), and a threat at the same time. Of course he's besotted with him, and would like to make him his own. But he's also aware Will is the only one who can too close for comfort and cause problems. So, would Hannibal, who always puts self-preservation above all else, be willing to make exceptions for him? Or is it easier to kill him?

Notes

> Hello, this is a fic I'd been planning on writing for a very long time:) Apologies in advance if there are any updating delays. Life's chaotic and busy❤️
>
> - The fic is set in Florence, but might shift to Baltimore, maybe. I haven't worked out the kinks in the story yet, I'm trusting the process. Shoutout to @MotherChesapeak on twitter for helping me out with the Italian parts🙈
>
> - Please feel free to comment, I don't bite! ❤️
>
> - MIND THE TAGS⚠️

See the end of the work for more notes

Inizio


[003]
[004]
You have an eye for the unseen, Will. It's a gift that can be a curse, but in your case, it's a melody that only the most attuned can hear. And I am listening.
A Song for the Ravenous
BY: Metaphysicalash
[002]

~~~~~

I

The sun cast golden hues upon Hannibal's Florentine mansion, his golden brown hair glinting in the rays. In the sunlight, Hannibal's amber eyes were reminiscent of aged whiskey illuminated by a warm glow. The light reflected the golden flecks, while the darker shades made them look quite like a tiger's eye stone. He took a sip of the rich, exquisite coffee, one he brewed at home, crafted with as much attention as he gave his other culinary creations.
~~~~~

The taste of the espresso rolled on his tongue, its aroma wafting from the cup. On the balcony table next to him, lay the morning's newspaper, La Nazione. On the front page was a headline emblazoned in bold letters:

IL MOSTRO DI FIRENZE COLPISCE ANCORA

(The Monster of Florence Strikes Again)

A subtle smile crossed Hannibal's face. He glanced at the picture of Lorenzo Moretti, the unfortunate soul who became the target of Il Mostro. The seemingly unassuming picture of Lorenzo, of him smiling, was a stark contrast to the mutilated manner in which his body was found—lying on his back, arms slightly spread out to the sides, palms facing upwards as if in surrender. His eyes were closed, and his expression serene, contrasting with the violent end he met. The organs were carved out of his body, and the corpse was surrounded by partially burnt coins and banknotes. Lorenzo's body was found in his office, in a pool of blood, posed as a man receiving "Divine Punishment," symbolic of "Reaping what you sow."

Lorenzo was a shady businessman who indulged in unethical practices to grow his empire, and now he lay dead within that very empire. A poetic ending.

He went back into his house, placing the now empty coffee mug into the sink. The lavish architecture and furnishings of his mansion, bright and glimmering in the sunlight, the chandeliers and ornate pieces flaunting themselves, were a complete contrast to the morbid secrets the house held.

Hannibal slipped into one of his three-piece suits, checking his reflection in the mirror. His golden brown bangs fell down his face as he picked up his leather bag and left the house. He walked past neatly trimmed hedges and plants in his garden, past a copy of Michaelangelo's David statue. A glistening black Alfa Romeo GTV V6 Coupé waited for him.

As he turned on the engine, there was a mechanical clatter. The initial rumble gave way to a sonorous purr. Placing his leather bag against the passenger seat, he started off, making his way to his office. Hannibal's drive from his mansion to the heart of Florence was routine, as familiar as the back of his hand. The Ponte Vecchio provided a sense of calm as he passed by. When he had time for himself, he would sometimes walk through the bridge with a sketchbook and draw whatever sparked his inner muse. But today, the bridge's usual allure was marred by an unusual commotion. Or... an expected one.

A crowd had gathered around, their attention fixed on the Carabinieri who were in the midst of hauling a body that was suspended at the side of the bridge in a grotesque display. The body of the latest victim, as it turned out to be. It might be grotesque to the usual crowd, but for Hannibal, it was an artistic masterpiece. A dark, thrilling tableau that he often took a fascination with. His eyes lacked even a modicum of remorse, only the quiet satisfaction of an art connoisseur admiring a stunning creation in a gallery. His smile was subtle, an almost imperceptible curve of his lips as he took in the scene with a detached calmness. The chaos, the curiosity, the horror—it was all a symphony to him, and he savored each note with delight.

As the officers busied themselves with the task at hand, Hannibal's smile deepened. He couldn't quite resist the temptation to take a look, even though he fully knew what to expect. He drove to the Garage Delle Terme, parked his car, paid the fee, then walked back to the bridge. He made his way through the crowd, to get a front row view, but was stopped by one of the officers.

"Signore, deve stare indietro." (sir, you need to stay back)

Hannibal pretended to be oblivious. "Cos'è successo, agente?" (What happened, officer?)

The officer looked back and then at him again. "Un uomo è stato ucciso e fatto a pezzi, lasciato appeso al ponte" (A man was killed and cut to pieces, left hanging from the bridge)

Hannibal glanced at the officers covering the corpse.

His gaze almost instantly fell on a young agent, who looked like he didn't belong there. The sight of unruly curls, glasses, stubble on the face, caught Hannibal's attention almost instantly. His eyes flitted over the young man's rather boring blue plaid shirt and dark gray corduroy pants, followed him as the agent pulled on a pair of gloves and peeled off the sheet shrouding the corpse. Towering next to him was Jack Crawford, whom Hannibal was fairly familiar with from a meeting in the past. It made everything a lot more curious, because Jack's presence in Florence was unusual. Hannibal's brows furrowed a bit as he saw Inspector Rinaldo Pazzi arrive as well, shaking hands with Crawford. That was new to Hannibal, to have different faces investigating his crimes.

The rapport between Jack Crawford and Pazzi could be deciphered later. Hannibal was more interested in the curly haired young man who piqued his interest. He stuck out like a sore thumb.

"Quel giovanotto sembra fuori posto," he said. (That young man seems out of place)

The officer nearby scoffed. "É un agente dall'America. Non ho idea del perché ci abbiano mandato un principiante." (He is an agent from America. I have no idea why they sent us a newbie)

Despite not knowing the young man at all, Hannibal was already convinced there was something... unique about him. To him, it didn't feel like he was jumping to conclusions. He watched as the young rookie FBI Agent stood, and Pazzi instructed all officers to clear the crime scene. Hannibal was forced to move away as well, much to his disappointment, his eyes fixed on the young Agent. It was odd that everyone needed to clear out just so the Agent could… investigate? Observe? It was unclear what he was doing. But, for a brief moment in time, the Agent looked up and his brooding gaze met Hannibal's. Oddly, it felt like time slowed. Hannibal's lips parted. The Agent just went back to doing whatever he was doing, as though disregarding the psychiatrist's presence. Then, Will's eyes closed and he just stood there, and Hannibal's eyebrows knitted together.

Curious.

Hannibal wanted to stay and watch, but unfortunately, his own duties beckoned him. He went back to the garage and took his car, driving to his private office. It was too early to say anything but his interest had never been this piqued before. For some odd reason, he was confident he'd cross paths with the young Agent again, and he intended to find out everything there was to know about him.

***

II

Hannibal's office was a blend of traditional elegance and professional modernity. The historic building in which it was located, had a façade featuring elements of Renaissance architecture. He parked his car and stepped out, entering the building. The waiting area was adorned with replicas of famous paintings, and rich, dark leather seats. The Birth of Venus, The School of Athens, among others. The area was well-lit by natural light seeping through tall, arched windows draped with heavy curtains.

Hannibal entered his private office, a reflection of his sophistication. High ceilings with wooden beams, terracotta tile flooring, walls lined with bookshelves, filled with medical texts and psychological treatises, some fictional literature as well. At the center of the room was a large, imposing desk made of dark wood. The patient's chair was positioned in a way that allows Hannibal to observe them against the light, giving him a psychological advantage during sessions. Diplomas and certificates were hung on the wall, along with awards for research. And perhaps the highlight of the office was the large replica of the *Primavera* on the wall behind Hannibal’s desk. His prized possession.

He was in the early stages of his psychiatry practice, and he was already catering to high-profile clients, which mostly consisted of the affluent, powerful and influential. He had already gained a bit of a reputation, helped further by word-of-mouth and through networking. His fellowship at John Hopkins definitely aided him.

His newest client who arrived fifteen minutes later, a real estate magnate, popped a cigar into his mouth, about to light it.

"This is a smoke-free area, Mr. Amante," Hannibal spoke, legs crossed.

Francesco Amante's influence did not put a dent into Hannibal's principles, rules, and personality. Even as Amante shot him a glance that was somewhere between surprise and vexation, Hannibal's unwavering gaze remained nonchalant and stoic. A subtle smile on his lips. Amante could pull a gun on him and even yet, Hannibal wouldn't budge from his seat.

Amante paused, sensing something in the young psychiatrist he couldn't put his fingers on. He slowly plucked the cigar out of his mouth and leaned back in his chair.

"Apologies." He tucked the cigar back into the inner pocket of his suit.

"Tell me about those death threats you've been receiving," Hannibal replied.

Amante almost snarled. "Knowing someone's out to get me, I'm not gonna sit back in my fucking couch and let it happen." His eyes glinted darkly. "You see... I prefer to be the hunter."

"Ah, the thrill of the hunt," Hannibal mused. "What do you hope to gain from being a hunter? Is it merely self-preservation, or something more profound?"

"It's about sending a message to those who think they can destroy me," Amante shifted in his seat. "And I wanna find the schmuck behind the threats."

"So it's the same person each time."

"Yeah. He uses the same fucking email address."

"And what would you do once you find this individual? Would you simply put a stop to the threats or—"

"Everyone's out for blood." Amante whipped a sidearm out of the holster hidden behind his suit and pointed it at Hannibal. "I'll kill them where they stand."

Hannibal didn't even bat an eyelid at the muzzle of the gun pointed at him. "Do you believe violence is the most effective means of dealing with problems? Or do you take pleasure in the act itself?"

"I'm guessing you know the answer."

Hannibal's dark smile widened. "I believe I do. How would you do it? Would you do it quickly or pause to gloat?"

Amante put the gun away and leaned forward. "Slow is good. You savor each moment."

This. This was Hannibal's area of expertise. One the world didn't know about. The very idea of killing slowly, taking one's time to relish the thrill, was something he knew well. And enjoyed it too. The more the conversation advanced, the more Hannibal pushed Amante to hunt down the one sending the death threats and killing them through subtle manipulation. All this just because Hannibal wanted to see what would happen.

"I believe you would've hired a private investigator by now to track down the source of the death threats."

"So you want me to go after him?"

"I'm merely pointing out the usual course of action after a death threat has been sent to a powerful, influential man such as yourself. A private investigator, or the police."

Amante made a 'tch' sound. "The police are useless. But I am planning to hire a private investigator."

At some point, Hannibal passed a momentary glance to the clock, which announced the end of the session. "Well, Mr. Amante, I hope that when we meet next, there will be some developments."

Uncrossing his legs, he rose and gestured to the door. As Amante walked out, Hannibal followed, passing a courteous smile before closing the door after him. A long breath escaped his nose, now that he had a period of privacy in his office. These were moments dedicated to reading or sketching with a glass of fine Barolo.

But this time, Hannibal found himself sitting near his desk and letting his mind drift back to that newbie Agent back at the bridge. He had an eidetic memory so he remembered the Agent's face well, as well as their momentary eye contact. Hannibal pondered whether he needed to pay Pazzi a visit, although he was well aware the Inspector wasn't exactly a fan of rich people. He relied on their past encounters, nights when Pazzi had visited Hannibal's home regarding an investigation. They would either have dinner, or simply talk over glasses of wine. Hannibal's hospitality and inherent charm earned him a place on Pazzi's 'Rich people who aren't that bad' list. The inspector might not show it, but Hannibal was the only wealthy man he didn't mind talking to.

Apparently that was an honor.

Hannibal thought maybe he could ask Pazzi about the new Agent. He was also familiar with Jack Crawford, but only fairly. So, it might be odd asking him. Looked like it was time to invite the Commendatore to dinner.

Hannibal went back to his desk, picking up a piece of paper and writing in elegant cursive script with a fountain pen:

Commendatore Rinaldo Pazzi,

I hope this letter finds you well.

It is with great pleasure that I invite you to dinner at my residence. We have a lot to catch up on, and I have recently come across a culinary delight which I think you might enjoy, given your appreciation of the finer things.

Please join me at 8 PM this evening. I look forward to an engaging conversation, exquisite cuisine, and a glass of Vermouth.

Warmest Regards,

Dr. Hannibal Lecter M.D

Hannibal closed the envelope, sealing it with wax. The stamp which bore a crest with his initials on it was embossed into the wax. He mailed the letter on his way home.

***

III

Pazzi was on time. He had a conflicted impression about Hannibal. While on one hand, he had some semblance of respect for Hannibal, the other part couldn't read him. He always found himself scrutinizing him, and Hannibal almost always pointed that out.

"What arouses your suspicions this time, Inspector?" Hannibal asked.

"Excuse me?" Pazzi said.

Hannibal gestured to Pazzi's frown and squinted eyes. "You're giving that look again. The same look you give when you face a suspect."

At that, Pazzi's frown eased and he half-smiled. "Apologies. Force of habit."

"Do you still hold the same resentment towards me as you do others of the same status as me?" Hannibal led him to the dinner table.

"You're not an asshole, so that's a start. The richer someone is, the bigger bastard they are."

"I will take that as a compliment." Hannibal brought him a glass of Spritz, along with a plate of Mushroom pâté crostini.

Pazzi sips the drink and hums. "Definitely a little Vermouth in there."

"A favorite of mine."

As the inspector took a bite of the Crostini, he had to bite back another hum of delight at how perfect the taste was. For some reason, he didn't want to get too excited. "So... what's this culinary delight you mentioned in the letter? As though all your meals aren't delights already."

"Now you're simply flattering me, inspector. I am rather meticulous about even the simplest of dishes. Like the Gnocco Fritto, for example." Hannibal places the dish on the table. "I prefer to source and cure my own meat. You've visited my home a few times, so I believe you're already aware of how I prefer to craft everything by hand."

"Yes, I do." Pazzi lifted the glass of Spritz to his mouth, but just before taking a sip, mutters under his breath, "Show-off."

Hannibal smiled, but barely looked at him as he took a bite of the Crostini. Pazzi also knew that their dinners were not without conversations that started out light, and then evolved into deeper subjects. At some point, the inspector would talk about the current case he was investigating and Hannibal would listen, maybe even give him some insight or help him with

the case. So, no dinner was simply casual. As much as he hated to admit, Pazzi did appreciate Hannibal's intellect. On occasions, complex cases were solved faster because of him. This also, in a way, irked Pazzi, because he would much rather do all the crime-solving by his own. He always had to swallow his pride when he needed to ask for help.

Hannibal brought in the Primo, which was Mushroom Risotto, with freshly cut truffles on top. "I admit there might be another reason why I invited you tonight."

As the two men sit across from each other, Pazzi places a napkin on his lap. "I suspected as much."

"I couldn't help but notice, at the Ponte Vecchio this morning, there was a newcomer in your team. An American."

Pazzi takes a bite of the Risotto. "This is divine, Doctor. And, you must be referring to Will Graham."

Will Graham. Hannibal mutters the name under his breath, allowing himself to familiarize with it. It had a nice ring to it. Deep within Hannibal's Memory Palace, a new room formed. A room for Will Graham. It was only an empty space for now. He knew the details and features of the room would materialize once he got acquainted with Will.

"Jack Crawford is an old friend," Pazzi added. "We... worked an old case once. Some criminal who escaped from America to Italy. Since then, we've kept in touch. Now, with Il Mostro, Crawford suspects the MO is similar to a serial killer back in America. They have a name for him..." Pazzi waves his fork in dismissal. "Something long. But anyway, Jack told me he has a gifted Agent with him. A rookie. He wanted to bring him along for... uh... experience, perhaps? I don't know. This kid is supposed to be something special. But only time will tell."

"Interesting." Hannibal smiled. "I would like to meet him."

"Why?"

“I briefly met Jack while I was doing my fellowship at John Hopkins back in Baltimore. It was a pleasure to meet his acquaintance, no matter how brief. I would like to catch up. And if this agent is as special as he says, I would like to find out for myself. Force of habit, you see. I simply want to learn this young agent’s psychology.”

Pazzi’s chewing slowed. “You’re strange, you know that?” He shrugged. “But whatever, Jack should be at the precinct tomorrow. I will give him your contact, maybe he can pay you a visit.”

“No, there’s no need for that. I’ll make my way to the precinct.”

Pazzi raised a brow. “You… wish to make an appearance at our little precinct? I didn’t expect.”

“I’m full of surprises.”

The rest of the dinner passed by in casual conversation, but inevitably shifted to the Il Mostro case. Hannibal spoke with practiced ease, giving the inspector some insights into his case which would help him understand Il Mostro. He had a way to his guest's heart through his food. The Secondo was Cabernet-Braised Osso Buco. Pazzi couldn't help but smell the food and murmur in delight. He completely forgot his reservations, his shoulders relaxing and his body language more open. It was exactly what Hannibal wanted. Pleasing the inspector was no big deal. It might seem like an insignificant thing right now, but in the grand scheme, it might prove useful. It was always good to be in the good graces of the police.

He was just satisfied he could get a meeting with Will Graham. He walked Pazzi out of the house and bid farewell.

Hannibal was never drawn to people without a reason, even if he had never met them or spoken to them before. He was thirty, and Will looked to be close to his age. Perhaps… twenty… five? He strongly felt something about Will, he just didn't know what.

He was about to find out.

Allettare

Chapter Notes

- Hello, hope you guys like this chapter. As always, mind the tags. Also, Aiden from Blood and Chocolate looks like a perfect young Will <3

~~~

IV

Hannibal arrived at the precinct, his coat draped over his arm. The precinct was a hive of activity. Officers running around, making calls, paying no heed to him. The smell of cheap coffee and ham sandwiches filled the air. Hannibal's nose scrunched a little, sensing the cheaply made food that he disapproved of with a passion. The bulletin boards on the wall were chock-full of the Il Mostro's crimes—grisly photos of victims, missing persons, a few potential suspects who could've been the Il Mostro but were crossed out. Hannibal drank in the beauty of his handiwork. To him, the otherwise unimpressive bulletin board felt a bit like an altar, worshiping and proudly displaying his work like art.

He inhaled deeply, smug about the fact that Il Mostro had no face. He was a void, an apparition. Simply the silhouette of a man with a giant white question mark at the center of his face. Hannibal's reverie was abruptly interrupted by a voice sounding outside the precinct.
~~~

"Why'd you bring me here, Jack?"

He turned to the entrance, only to see the very young agent he was eager to see, coming in rather hurriedly. The curly-haired young man wasn't looking in front of him as he entered the building, followed by Jack Crawford. Hannibal eyed the coffee cup in his hand and sensed that he should probably step out of the way of the evidently grumpy man. But he stood his ground.

The second Will turned to what was in front of him, he bumped right into Hannibal, spilling his cheap black coffee over his own hand, jacket, and plaid shirt.

"Jesus fucking Christ." he grumbled, wincing from the scalding liquid and whipping his hand. His bespectacled, fiery blue eyes glanced up at Hannibal with a vexation. "You could've easily stepped out of the way and saved us both a shitty day."

"Will." Jack spoke authoritatively, his voice rising a decibel higher than Will's. "Calm down."

"No, no, he is right," Hannibal replied, whipping his coat, eyeing the coffee stain on it. "It is my fault. I did see him coming and did not move in time."

While Will scoffed, Jack's mouth parted at the sight of Hannibal. "Well, I'll be damned. Doctor Hannibal Lecter."

Hannibal bowed his head slightly. "Agent Jack Crawford. It is an absolute pleasure to meet you once again. Time flies swiftly and the world is small, isn't it?"

Jack gave a faint chuckle. "You can say that again. It's surprising to see you here." He shook Hannibal's hand. He glanced at Will. "Will, I'd like you to meet Doctor Hannibal Lecter. We met at John Hopkins once, during the Minnesota Shrike case. Doctor Lecter was instrumental in helping us find out who the Shrike was."

"You give me too much credit, Jack. I merely acted as a signboard to point you in the right direction. But hunting down the Shrike and figuring it all was all you."

"You're downplaying yourself." Jack gestured to Will. "This is our newest young agent, Will Graham."

Hannibal extended a hand to Will. "Commendatore Pazzi told me about you. I'd been looking forward to our meeting."

"Yeah, yeah." Will shook his hand with disinterest.

The handshake was brief and Will pulled away too soon. Hannibal barely got to cherish the warmth of his hand, missing the touch when the agent withdrew his hand.

"I was better off in Virginia," Will replied. "Ask the Italian police who keep looking at me like an abomination; I don't belong here."

"Well, too bad," Jack replied bluntly. "Unfortunately for you, you're the one rookie Special Agent who excelled in profiling and nobody can do what you do."

"Good for them. At least, their heads aren't in a constant loop of nightmare montage."

Jack sighed. "You know what? Good thing Doctor Lecter's here. He can keep your head straight."

Will gives a spiteful grin. "No, thank you." He shot Hannibal a look. "Therapy doesn't work on me." Then brushed past Hannibal and moved to the bulletin board.

Normally, someone with that brand of attitude would be added to Hannibal's list and meet a grisly end, transformed into culinary art. However, Hannibal didn't feel even a sliver of offense by Will's words. It was surprising even to him how the agent's defiance both impressed and amused him. He couldn't take his eyes off Will the whole time. His eidetic memory captured a vivid mental photograph of Will in all his raw detail. He observed Will's lack of eye contact, the way his hand glided over the brown curls, the way his irises darted over the bulletin board, the way his lips moved as if he was having a silent conversation with himself. The way his ears wiggled ever so slightly.

"I apologize, doctor," Jack said. "He can be a little..."

"No apologies necessary," Hannibal replied. "I take no offense. I already can sense Will's uniqueness."

"Maybe we could use your help. I could use your help."

"I am at your disposal. How may I help?"

"I need you to... keep an eye on him." Jack blew a gust of air, his hands coming to his hips. "Look, I know this isn't your usual practice. I'm willing to cover your fees—"

"Jack, you are right in saying that this isn't what I usually do. But, I see potential in Will. If my expertise can help him remain on track mentally, so that he may see the Il Mostro, then I am happy to offer my services."

"I—" Will turned to Jack, then Hannibal. "—do not need a therapist."

Hannibal took a step forward. "You don't have to consider this therapy. It is simply a formality, and hopefully, a conversation."

Will huffed. "I don't do friends."

"An acquaintance, then. I only wish to help you, Will."

"That will not be necessary, thank you, doctor. I have it handled."

Jack's eyes hardened. "You don't have it handled, Will. You haven't bloody slept. And you were hallucinating the last time. What you need is a psych eval." Before Will could protest, Jack put his hand up. "You will not be allowed to work in the field unless you get a psych eval. That's an order."

Will's lips twitched, his jaw clenched, his eyes briefly meeting Hannibal's again. How beautifully this worked in Hannibal's favor. The moth flying right into the flame. But of course, he couldn't let his excitement get in the way.

With a feigned humility, he spoke, "I understand if Agent Graham isn't open to my services. Approaching a psychiatrist should be a conscious decision."

"You're being too polite, doctor. Trust me, he needs it." Jack's eyes widened a bit, as if he was about to shoot lasers and burn a hole right through Will's skull.

Will mirrored Jack's stance, putting his hands on his hips too. He shook his head and walked past Hannibal. "Whatever."

Hannibal had the nose of a Bloodhound, so he couldn't help but inhale as Will passed by. His eyes closed a moment as he processed the scent of sweat, a dog... and along with Will's own unique musk was another scent. A fevered sweetness. Hannibal's eyes snapped open and the corners of his lips curved slightly up.

Now that's interesting.

Pazzi came striding into the precinct with heavy steps, sipping some coffee. "Buongiorno." His eyes darted between Hannibal, Crawford, and Will in quick succession. "I see you gentlemen have already met."

"Thank you for giving me the permission," Hannibal replied.

"Yes, well, there's no time for sweet reunions." He glanced at Jack. "There's been another body."

"Where?" Jack asked, his features hardening.

Pazzi faced him.

"The Uffizi Gallery."

***

V

The Birth of Venus, in all its glory.

And in front of it, Venus herself, except in the body of an innocent woman. The woman's skin was pallid, as she stood naked on display, in front of the original painting. A golden cloth

covered her lower regions, while her arm was across her breasts. Her body was stiff, tied to a pole behind her, her eyes open in a lifeless stare. Four mirrors surrounded her.

Hannibal was allowed into the crime scene with Jack's permission, much to Will's clear disapproval. While Hannibal watched the scene with a silent, subdued fascination, Will was also fascinated, but in a negative way. Perhaps an uneasy mix of disbelief, horror, and intrigue. To Zeller, Beverly, and Price, it was just plain horror and repulsion.

"What the fu—" Price whispered.

Zeller moved in to observe the body. "Rigor Mortis is at its peak. I'd definitely say twelve hours."

"Did the killer wait twelve hours before putting it here?" Beverly frowned.

Zeller nodded. "It seems like it."

"He could've manipulated the body after death," Will added, staring at the corpse. "Tied up the victim's arms, positioned them the way he wanted and waited."

"So that Rigor Mortis would help setting the..." Price gestured to the corpse. "Pose."

Beverly pointed to the mirrors. "The way they're positioned. It's like the killer wants us to admire his work from all angles."

Will's eyes narrowed a bit. "Fascination. To gaze and marvel at the beauty of Venus. Our killer's fascinated by something or someone."

Hannibal's eyes darted towards Will and he smiled. "Or could he be fascinated by the painting itself? An art connoisseur, perhaps?"

"Partly, maybe," Will replied, taking off his glasses. "I need a few minutes."

Jack, who stood in the background, nodded and ordered everyone. "Everyone clear the room. You, as well, Doctor Lecter."

Hannibal felt a tinge of disappointment. He was yet again taken away from Will. But as everyone cleared the area, Hannibal insisted on staying at a safe distance, and observing Will from the shadows. As Will closed his eyes, Hannibal watched him stepping back, then raising his hand, as if in a trance. His movements didn't make sense to anyone, and the officers who didn't know him likely thought he was crazy.

But Hannibal? Oh, for Hannibal, this was the most fascinating thing he'd ever seen. He was mesmerized to say the least. His interest was piqued to the level of Mount Everest. All he wanted was to have a chance to pick apart Will's mind and learn more about him. It didn't matter if he had to use unconventional methods for it.

Will's hands moved in the air, near the victim's corpse, as if he was the one molding it. Then he stopped abruptly, opening his eyes with a soft gasp.

"Jack," he called.

His team and Pazzi all went to him, and Hannibal followed close behind.

"It's a... presentation for someone," Will said. "This entire thing is done to impress."

"Impress who?" Jack asked.

"I have no idea. Could be anyone. The killer's fascinated by someone and this is his ... gift, so to speak, to impress this person."

Hannibal smiled. *Brilliant.*

To Hannibal, it felt like someone was holding up a mirror to him, much like the mirrors facing the victim. A Will Graham shaped mirror. And maybe, just maybe, for once, he wasn't averse to this mirror knowing everything about him. He stared at Will like one would stare at stars. Curiouser and curiouser... a young man with an untapped potential that the world was too blind to see. But Hannibal saw. He knew darkness when he saw it, and he felt a strange kind of kinship to him. How could he let him go now?

When the FBI busied themselves with collecting evidence and photos and lowering the victim's body, Will put his glasses back on and tore away from the crowd, walking to a silent corner. Hannibal approached.

"That was an astute observation," he said. "A killer looking to impress someone. A woman, perhaps?"

"Maybe," Will replied. "He's meticulous. There's a morbid elegance to his killings. An artful eye. His previous victim, the man on the Ponte Vecchio, was a public shaming. But this... this is... different. He wants attention for a different reason. Particularly from someone specific. Question is, who?"

"Perhaps we could discuss it in my office along with your psych eval."

"Just so you know, I don't need your therapy—"

"And I am not forcing it on you. This won't be therapy. It is simply a formality, and hopefully, a conversation."

Will looked him in the eye briefly, a moment longer than he would usually look at anyone. Hannibal took that as an honor.

***

VI

That night, Will was probably out of his mind, either due to lack of sleep, or the headaches. Because if he was alert, he would've probably noticed that he was being followed home.

Sleep wasn't kind to him that night either. Sweat soaked his shirt and part of his boxers. His damp hair stuck to his forehead. His head was too consumed by the nightmare that plagued his psyche, to notice Hannibal's unsettling figure standing near his bed, looking down at him. Hannibal knelt near him, observing how the man trembled in his sleep. Reaching to take his arm delicately, he brushed his thumb along Will's inner elbow joint, where the vein was. The ideas, the desires, everything Hannibal wanted to do to him fell together in his mind like puzzle pieces.

But not tonight.

Tonight, Hannibal was content with satisfying his appetite with the very sight of Will, finding nourishment in his very presence. He leaned in and inhaled sharply, memorizing the different scents he could pick up from Will. The strong smell of sweat was simply an indicator of something else. Something Hannibal picked up the first time he had smelled Will.

He could tell him the truth. But where was the fun in that?

Nah... this game had just begun, and he wanted to savor each moment.

"Sweet dreams, my dear boy," Hannibal whispered, rising to his feet.

As silently as he had entered Will's house like an apparition, he disappeared the same.

A few moments passed before Will suddenly woke from a nightmare, breathing heavily and gasping. His eyes flitted around the room, then to the clock showing 3 AM. Chills wracked his frame and he rubbed his arms. A strange unease churned in his stomach, for reasons he didn't know. He pulled his sweaty shirt off, laid out a towel on the bed then went back to sleep, pulling the covers over himself.

Nella Mente del Cacciatore

~~~~

VII

Hannibal opened the door, his heart fluttering at the sight of Will, standing akimbo and facing away from him. Now it was beyond Hannibal's control that his gaze would drop to Will's derriere, almost inadvertently. Almost.

"Ah, Agent Graham," he stepped aside and let him in. "Please come in."

As Will passed by, the scent of his unwanted aftershave hit Hannibal's nostrils. A ship on the bottle? The smell did not suit Will at all. Hannibal made a mental note to suggest a better aftershave as he shut the door.

"Alright, out with it," Will dropped on the leather seat, manspreading across it. "It's too early for me to get kicked out of my budding career. I want this job. Keeps me sane."

"I assure you, Will, I have no intention of stealing your job from you," Hannibal walked to his desk and picked up the psych eval paper, handing it to him. "You're fit for duty."

Will frowned. "What?"

His eyes scanned the report real quick:
~~~~

THE OFFICE OF DR. HANNIBAL LECTER, PSY.D, M.D.

RE: Psychological Evaluation of Agent William Graham

REFERENCE NUMBER: CB092373

EVALUATOR: Dr. Hannibal Lecter

Per the direction and auspices of colleague Dr. Alana Bloom, this evaluation has been prepared for Agent Jack Crawford with a RECOMMENDATION regarding Agent Will Graham's suitability for active field service.

SUMMARY EVALUATION: After reviewing Agent Will Graham's case file, conducting personal interviews, and completing a full battery of psychological tests, it is apparent that Agent Graham exhibits a deep and sustained understanding of the subtext of social interactions, as well as communicating his own emotional state. No personality disorders were evident, as he seems well fit for all normative social and occupational situations. He demonstrated both focus and situational flexibility, with a special talent for understanding dynamic field challenges and problem solving. What's more, he shows an acute ability to empathize with a case. This may be his only professional fault.

Moreover, Agent Graham's professional history with homicide investigations only serve to buttress his value in the field. His overall stability makes him an asset to Bureau and any agent who might have the good fortune to be on his team.

FINAL RECOMMENDATION: SUITABLE FOR ACTIVE FIELD SERVICE

Dr. Hannibal Lecter, Psy.D, M.D.

"Why would you clear me?" Will asked.

"Because you need my help, and I don't need Jack interfering with our conversations," Hannibal took a seat across from Will. "Everything stays within these walls. Whether you consider this therapy, or simply having conversations, it is up to you."

Will kept the report aside and paused for a moment, as though considering how much he needed to reveal to Hannibal. "There might be another reason why Jack brought me to Florence."

Hannibal tilted his head ever so slightly, keenly listening.

"The MO of the Il Mostro matches very closely to the serial killer known as the Chesapeake Ripper, back in Baltimore," Will replied. "In fact, I think it IS him."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes," Will replied. "The Ripper had been killing in Baltimore for a while, then it... stopped. Jack and Pazzi had been discussing cases before, and this one happened to come somewhere

in their casual conversations."

"In this conversation between two close friends, when did the subject of Il Mostro come into the picture?"

"When the Inspector realized the MO between Il Mostro and the Ripper was too close of a match, except for some minor differences which I picked up on."

"Such as?"

"The murders back in Baltimore were slightly... rough around the edges, so to speak. It wasn't substantial. The crimes were clean, no evidence was found, but the way the organs were carved out or the victims' bodies were mutilated suggests a somewhat rough work. It lacked the finesse that Il Mostro displayed in his killings."

Hannibal's mind drifted away for a brief moment, taking Will's words into consideration. Indeed, the lack of finesse in the murders back in Baltimore was evident. The kind of perfection that did not live up to the killer's own expectations suggested that he was only starting out. A budding serial killer in the making. Even if he was careful back then, he would still not be as efficient with his surgical organ removal as he would be now. The differences between the crimes of the Ripper and Il Mostro were subtle, and only those with a sharp eye such as Will Graham and Hannibal could notice the details.

Will Graham indirectly called the Ripper an amateur. Hannibal wasn't sure if he should feel insulted or impressed. But... there was more to this. Back in Baltimore, the news reports at the time also spoke of a 'copycat killer'.

"Are you sure the murders back in Baltimore are the work of this Chesapeake Ripper?" Hannibal asked. "You said the murders lacked the finesse which was present in the Il Mostro crimes. So, perhaps... a copycat killer?"

Will sighed. "Yeah, the thought did come into my head. But my gut refused to align with it."

"Your gut brought you a long way from home."

"Jack brought me a long way from home."

"Something tells me you're not easily swayed. There is a part of you, however miniscule, that followed the Chesapeake Ripper here because the case intrigued you. You were curious."

Will couldn't help but agree. It was the first time someone was so perceptive of him. "I was... still in the Academy when the Ripper crimes first began. My performance surpassed everyone else. People were collectively envious of me."

"As they should be. Jack Crawford had the right intuition when he took you in. You got accustomed to the case very quickly, with an uncanny ability to peek into the minds of serial killers."

"I don't know if I can call it peeking, but you sure did your homework."

"I read your profile. But it didn't speak of your empathy disorder. That one I discovered in the little time I spent with you in the crime scenes."

"It's a curse."

"You have an eye for the unseen, Will. It's a gift that can be a curse, but in your case, it's a piece of music that only the most attuned can hear. And I am listening."

There was a pause. Will Graham, the man who never looked anyone in the eye for more than a second, was now staring at Hannibal, trying to read him. But Hannibal's Sphinx-like countenance was impenetrable. Those amber eyes seemed like a mirror held up in front of Will where he could perceive himself. It was both strangely relieving and unsettling for someone to be perceptive of him.

"I don't like... anyone getting into my head."

"You're afraid of letting anyone into the darkness of your mind, thinking they might judge you."

"I lose myself in that darkness sometimes."

"There's a beauty in the shadows, a truth that only those who dare to look can see. You're not afraid of the dark, are you, Will?"

"It has an affinity with me."

"And what if, within this darkness, we find a reflection of our true selves?"

Will paused, thinking about his nightmares, thinking about the things that scared him. The ones he didn't want to face. The things that reminded him of a side of him he denied. His fingers twitched and gripped the leather sofa. Hannibal's sharp gaze flitted to his hands then at him.

"What are you running from, Will?"

Will's lips parted. Hannibal was too intrusive. Too much, too sharp. It didn't take him long to destroy the walls Will put up around himself. This was something no one else was able to do, and now when someone did it so easily, it unsettled Will. He rose from the sofa, almost abruptly.

"I need to leave."

Hannibal's lips twitched with disappointment, but he quickly shrugged it off, uncrossing his legs and standing. "Will—"

"This is why I fucking hate therapy."

Will stormed out of the office with Hannibal at his heel, trying to stop him, in vain. He was pissed at how someone saw right through him so easily. It only proved to him he did a shitty job at masking his secrets, trying to appear fine on the outside. Even his forensic team didn't

know him that well. Hannibal stopped at the doorway of the building, watching the agent go out in the street.

When Will took a last glance at Hannibal, his eyes widened at what looked like a large feathered stag, the color of the night sky, slowly trot towards Will. His breath hitched and he stepped backwards, unable to discern if what he was seeing was a hallucination or not.

"Will!"

Will probably saw Hannibal move, but his eyes were fixed on the creature making its way towards him, driving him further and further back out onto the road. The rush of cars, the blaring horns, none of it got through to him. It was only when one horn sounded much closer than the others that Will's head snapped to the right, catching the dazzling headlight of a car screeching towards him.

Two strong hands grabbed his jacket and yanked him to safety, as the car sped past behind Will. Hannibal pulled him into a protective embrace, holding his trembling and twitching body steady. Will gasped, breath faltering as he glanced wide-eyed at the doctor.

"Will, look at me." Hannibal brought his large hands to clasp Will's face, forcing him to keep his gaze on him and nowhere else. "Focus on me. Breathe."

"D-did you see that?" Will whispered.

"See what?"

"It was there, next to you."

"What was?"

"Tell me you saw it!" Will desperately pointed out to a spot next to the building.

Hannibal glanced around and saw nothing. He noticed Will's skin feeling abnormally warm and feverish under his hands, and the beads of sweat on his face. Hannibal immediately figured out what was going on, but decided against telling the agent. To him, this was all a thing of beautiful fascination. The puzzle, the dark fantasy that was Will Graham deserved to be studied and explored. Telling Will he was imagining things because of an underlying condition would ruin all the possibilities Hannibal foresaw for them.

"I see nothing," he replied.

Will blinked quickly and realized there was indeed nothing there. And he looked at the doctor again. "Am I going crazy?"

In this transient moment of vulnerability, Hannibal knew he had Will's future in the palm of his hand. Like a lump of clay waiting to be shaped according to Hannibal's desires.

"No," he answered, still holding Will's face. "You are not crazy."

He slowly drew Will in, letting his head rest on his shoulder as he hugged him. He supported the back of his head with a large hand, which slipped down to hold the nape of his neck. He leaned his head against Will's, closing his eyes and breathing in his scent. His mouth parted, the heady, feverish smell of Will arousing him.

"You are safe," he whispered, hearing Will's low whimpers. "You are okay."

Will, in his confused, fevered state, absent-mindedly and desperately clung onto Hannibal's suit, clenching the fabric in his fists.

The smile on Hannibal's face turned darker.

***

VIII

Hannibal sat down at his desk, his eyes fixed on the window overlooking the Florentine skyline. The sun was dipping below the horizon, casting the city in a warm, golden glow. He reached for his journal and began to write:

19th August, 1997

Will captivates me each time. The time we had spent was short, but in this brief period, he had already exhibited his unique ability to enter the minds of killers. I had the privilege of watching his mind at work first-hand at the Uffizi gallery. It was... marvelous.

Brilliant. Upon further observation, I noticed the telltale signs of sleep deprivation, nightmares, and subsequent hallucinations. At the Uffizi gallery, I had picked up a distinct scent from him that sparked a suspicion in me. A fevered sweetness, so to speak.

Will does not think it is a mental illness. Convincing him as such would be futile without proper planning, as he possesses a sharp instinct. But he is unaware of the truth, and I wish to keep it that way. For now.

Hannibal smiled, then continued writing:

Remarkable, beautiful boy. How I wish to eat your heart.

Contrasto e Connessione

Chapter Summary

Will kissing Hannibal in public at a party? Yes, drunk Will would so do that :3

X

Will's face scrunched from the crap coffee he got from the precinct. "Why the fuck am I being invited to some fancy party?"

"I haven't a clue," Jack replied, shrugging. "Lecter wants us both, you in particular, to be there."

"He seems to like you," Pazzi added, chomping down on a ham sandwich, then speaking while chewing. "His parties are always spectacular. It's a great opportunity."

"For what? Being forced to socialize with a nauseating crowd of flamboyant rich people?"

Jack smirked. "The food must be great." He allowed himself a brief chuckle when he saw Will's deadpan face. Jack rarely ever laughed, so this was an absolute once-in-a-lifetime

exception. "Look, kid, just go. There's a reason he's calling you. Besides, he's helping with the case too. Who knows, you might gain some information or insight."

It was all easier said than done. Will didn't even know what the fuck he should be wearing for a party like that. So, when he went home, his choice was clear and probably the only one he had: a single charcoal blazer in his cupboard. He took it out, and put it over a navy blue shirt and an old matching trouser combo. He combed his hair to a side part, hoping it would make him look less like a fisherman in any way. There was only so much he could do.

He took a cab to go to the party, which was held at a private palazzo owned by Hannibal. Will already felt out of place from the moment he stepped out of the cab right in the midst of flashy, expensive vehicles. *What the hell am I doing here?* Was the first question that popped into his head. He got out of the car and headed to the palazzo, taking a glance up at the three-storeyed masterpiece of Renaissance architecture. The imposing building had arched windows, and ivy crawled up one side of the structure.

A man in a suit stood in front of the grand wooden double doors, welcoming Will with a bow of his head. "Signore Graham, Dr. Lecter is expecting you. Please follow me."

Will awkwardly followed the steward into the building, immediately enveloped by the cool, marble interior of the foyer. The floor beneath him was a mosaic of dark and light stones, and the ceiling soared high above, adorned with frescoes. The area was lit by the warm glow of the crystal chandelier.

Will was led into the salon, which was so vast it was overwhelming for him. The high ceilings had gilded moldings. The windows were framed by tall velvet drapes. At one side of the room was a long table, draped in white linen, and laden with an extravagant array of hors d'oeuvres and fine wines. A string quartet played in one corner of the room. The demeanor of the guests was relaxed, but they moved with a kind of practiced elegance that spoke of money and influence. Will already felt restless when he caught some of the attention of the guests, who were all dressed in their finest attire. It was obvious some of the gazes questioned his bleak outfit. Well, he didn't want to be here in the first place.

Thankfully, one of those gazes was that of Hannibal. The host and the center of the attention, dressed in a velvet tuxedo the color of wine, which hugged his figure. The gold bezel of his Vacheron Constantin watch glinted in the light. His golden bangs were combed up and to the side, to prevent covering his face. Side-parted and elegant. The man was the very definition of ethereal beauty and it was evident from the way he was always surrounded by men and women, vying for his attention. The women, in particular, were trying too hard to steal any chance of being close to him and possibly winning an invitation to his more private dinner parties.

But Hannibal's sights were only focused on Will, as he sipped his champagne. As Will made his way to him, he noticed the clear admiration in Hannibal's eyes. It was a stark contrast to the way the others in the salon were staring at him.

A woman in a blue evening gown standing right next to Hannibal—clearly infatuated with him and flirtatious—frowned at Will with a tinge of envy. Her mouth dropped a bit when

Hannibal excused himself from her like she was inconsequential, slipping past her, and going to Will.

Hannibal smiled widely as he approached Will. "I'm so pleased you came."

"Yeah, well, did I have a choice?"

"Yes, you did. You could've declined, yet something drew you here. Whatever it was, I am thankful for it."

Will shifted restlessly, unable to respond to that. "Hm."

"Perhaps a drink?" Hannibal ordered for the waiter to bring Will a glass of wine.

But when the waiter arrived, Will dismissed the wine.

"Something stronger," Will replied in a low voice. "So I can numb myself, and maybe all this would feel less nauseating. No offense."

Hannibal was amused by his blunt candor. "Not at all. I'm completely aware my parties aren't for all. I do it out of necessity. It's always useful to make and keep connections in my line of work. They prove useful in times of need."

Will nodded. "Fair enough."

Hannibal ordered the waiter to bring in some whiskey instead, and after a few moments, the drink was brought and handed to Will, who took a big sip of it.

"If you wish, we could leave," Hannibal said.

Will raised a brow. "I highly doubt your guests would appreciate that."

"I'll simply tell them I have an urgent matter to attend to."

Hannibal led him out the back of the palazzo, to the garden outside. The noise of the party grew muffled, softer and softer, the further they walked from it. The cool breeze was welcoming and the quietness refreshing. Will felt calmer, thankful for the opportunity to remove himself from that place. They walked along a cobblestone path, Will sipping his whiskey with one hand while his other hand was buried in his trouser pocket. Hannibal cradled the champagne glass, his sparkling eyes subtly observing him. His lips never lost their smile. It was almost instinctive, the way they curved up in the agent's presence.

"Do you often find yourself retreating from social gatherings?" he asked.

Will huffed softly. "Really, we're gonna have a therapy session right here?"

Hannibal let out a barely perceptible laugh. A sight that a painful few had the privilege to see. Will was among them. The doctor wasn't usually this candid with anyone. "It doesn't have to be therapy, but I would like to learn more about you. If we are going to work on this Il

Mostro case, I would inevitably dig deeper into your psyche. I would rather listen to you, whatever you feel comfortable to share."

Will gave him a side-glance then down at the whiskey. "I'm not a people person. Crowds make it harder to think."

"And what thoughts occupy you now, in this solitude?"

"Hard to decipher. It's like a chorus of voices in my head, all screaming to be heard. And none of them are worth listening to. Not without losing my sanity."

"You despise the noise of the crowd, but that is easier to escape than the noise in your head. You're never truly free, are you?"

"Free." *If only.* Freedom was a luxury, especially considering Will's life story. "No."

"Would you like to know what I think?"

"You would tell me what you thought even if I didn't want it."

"True. So let me say it as it is. In a world full of masks and masquerades, I find it refreshing to see a soul that is raw and bare. Exposed, and not ashamed of it."

Will lifted the glass to his lips as he spoke, "Oh, you don't know me that well."

"Perhaps not entirely. But I see enough. And what I see, it is clear to me."

The agent shifted restlessly, unable to respond to that. "It's unsettling, but in doing so, they offer us a kind of understanding we've never known before. Who wouldn't want to be understood?"

Will slowed to a halt, and stood, staring at the moon. Hannibal's words hung in the air, subtle, but charged with an intensity. Every word seemed to always dig deeper into Will, peeling open his layers one by one. For someone to see through him was definitely unsettling, but he wasn't sure if he was ready for Hannibal to see every part of him just yet. Jesus fucking Christ, he'd only known Hannibal for... what, a day? Two days? He couldn't remember. And the doctor was already making him feel all sorts of ways he didn't want to feel. Maybe he could use more whiskey. He downed the rest of the alcohol and turned around to the palazzo.

"Look, whatever's between us, I much rather it be professional," he said, a bit terse than he intended. "The last thing I need is someone poking inside my head. I don't really have friends, and there's a reason." He walked away. "I need another drink."

Will entered the palazzo, looking for the bar with some urgency.

What should've been a glass of whiskey, turned into two, then three, then perhaps a couple more until the alcohol dulled Will's irritation, replacing it with a hazy numbness. He was somewhat self-aware about how much he drank, and stumbled through the crowd in the hall to find a quieter corner. All the while cursing himself for his foolishness. Some of the guests

passed dirty looks at him when he accidentally bumped into them, to which he responded with ignorance.

As he tried to navigate his way to the best of his abilities, his balance faltered and he accidentally bumped into another guest. This time, a man who was dressed to the nines, just like all the others in the party.

"Excuse me," Will muttered and glanced up at the guest. His eyebrows furrowed when the man's face sparked recognition. "Hugo?"

The man named Hugo met Will's gaze, his mouth parted in incredulity. "Okay, I did not see this coming."

"What the fuck—" Will breathed, staring at the man as if he was about to burn a hole through his skull. "What are you doing here?"

The last thing the agent needed was to bump into what unexpectedly was his ex-boyfriend at a party in fucking Florence, of all places. It was too coincidental. For a moment, he wondered if he was truly in Florence or back in Baltimore, because the very sight of his ex brought back a vortex of distasteful memories Will would much rather bury sixty feet underground. Damn the whiskey.

Hugo licked his bottom lip. "I am here because I'm a businessman and I have connections. Besides—" He scanned Will from head to toe with a clear disapproval of his bleak clothing. "I could ask you the same thing."

"I'm here on a case."

"Of course. What other reason could there be? So, how's the work? Still chasing after phantoms?"

"Fuck off, Hugo." Will moved unsteadily to a quieter corner.

The wiser decision would be to leave him alone, but instead, Hugo followed him.

"Still tetchy, I see. We once used to have civil conversations," Hugo said. As Will leaned against a wall, Hugo leaned in. "But I can overlook that attitude of yours, if you could... meet me later. Maybe in the restrooms? I still think about you. Maybe being a good fuck is one of your more redeeming qualities."

Something ignited within Will, when he usually would prefer avoiding conflict. He grabbed Hugo's tuxedo lapels and growled. "Do not fucking test me."

A voice tore through the heated atmosphere of their conflict. "Gentlemen."

Both men's heads turned to Hannibal, who smoothly showed up in the nick of time. His presence caught Hugo off guard. Will unwillingly let go of his former lover, who with one hand, smoothed down his tuxedo, before turning his attention to Hannibal.

"It's nothing, Dr. Lecter," Hugo replied, face lighting up in the doctor's presence, as though meeting a celebrity. "Just catching up with a former friend. I was just remarking on how exquisite your soirée is this evening. Truly, you have an exceptional taste in everything, from the guests to the ambience."

Will's jaw clenched. Every word that escaped Hugo's mouth, his flattery of Hannibal, was adding fuel to the fire.

"Thank you for the compliment. In my experience, reunions are usually sentimental," Hannibal spoke. "Either with tearful eyes or a joyful smile or both."

"Most certainly." Hugo nodded a bit too eagerly.

Hannibal's following response came as calm as usual, but had a sharp edge. "However, I believe my guest here would appreciate quieter company."

Hugo's smile faltered a bit. "Of course... I wouldn't want to bother him. Will Graham is evidently not the party kind, I would know well."

Will, influenced by the alcohol and tired of Hugo's presence, wanted to make a statement. He turned to Hannibal, driven by a sudden urge to assert his own agency. Leaning in, he pressed his lips to Hannibal's in a deliberate, unsteady kiss. His hands held the sides of Hannibal's face, in a gesture meant to prove to Hugo—and in some ways, himself—that he had moved on, and wanted nothing to do with the past.

Hannibal's eyes momentarily widened in surprise, before he quickly gathered his composure and held Will's arm. His lips opened willingly for Will, allowing him in, taking in his unexpected display of passion. The kiss was brief, filled with a blend of recklessness and defiance, and had enough impact to leave Hannibal breathless. Hugo's face flushed with embarrassment and anger. He looked between the two men, struggling to mask his indignation. Struggling to process the insult.

Will broke the kiss, leaving Hannibal stunned, before turning to his ex. Seeing Hugo tighten his fists and storm off provided Will with a sense of satisfaction, but once that satisfaction lifted, embarrassment crept in just as swiftly, turning the tips of his ears red. Whatever had pushed him to make an unthinkable move like that, he would appreciate it if it never happened again. He could barely look Hannibal in the eye.

"S-sorry," he muttered.

Hannibal didn't think anyone could leave him speechless. He was always one for last words, after all. "It appears that the whiskey has loosened your inhibitions."

Jesus Christ, Will wished the ground would open up and swallow him whole. He cursed his own body for not even being able to stand straight without swaying in one spot. "It... I have no excuse..."

"No apologies necessary. However, I firmly think you need some fresh air. I could drop you home."

"No thanks. I'm... I'm fine." Will staggered.

"Mr. Graham, I understand the need to be alone. But, in your state, it's not wise to drive. Let me drop you. One of my servants can deliver your car to your house safely, I assure you."

Everything in Will was screaming that this was a bad idea, but what choice did he have? He stupidly gulped down five glasses of whiskey. He mentally cursed himself for his incoherency, and the way he awkwardly walked with unsteady steps next to Hannibal. Hannibal's arm remained hovering just behind Will's back, not quite touching him, but ready to catch him if needed. Will's accidental kiss with Hannibal wasn't exactly a hundred percent discreet as he hoped it would be. He just wanted to prove a point to Hugo, but turned out, some of the other guests in the party, especially the ones who had a special affinity with Hannibal, aimed daggers at Will. He sensed the gazes on him, but didn't meet any of them. Hannibal leaned in, his voice dropping to a velvety whisper as he spoke.

"Ignore them. They're not worth the time of your day."

Something about his whisper sent chills running down Will's spine, tingling throughout his body. Maybe it was because of that goddamned kiss. Everything felt different after that (and the six glasses of Macallan). He couldn't balance himself if his life depended on it. As his foot slipped over the stairs outside the entrance of the palazzo, Hannibal's arm swiftly snaked around his waist and pulled him close, his fingers tightening. Heat pooled in Will's stomach from that touch alone, and flared throughout his body.

Hannibal led him to his Alfa Romeo, and dismissed his chauffeur. He wanted to drive Will to the hotel himself.

As he drove, Will sat in the passenger seat, leaning against the window and fighting to keep his eyes open. He had at least a modicum of reasoning left to know that what he just did at the party was going to nag at his brain cells for the next one week at least. Fucking hell, he knew he should've held back with the whiskey. Hannibal was his therapist, of course he would dive into Will's mental state. It was his job. But his perception always made Will so uncomfortable. The doctor never shied away from being painfully honest that sometimes Will wished he would shut up. Now, thanks to that senseless move he made at the party, the only thing that looped inside the agent's brain was the kiss.

Hannibal's goddamned lips.

Will rubbed his eyes, as if that would rub away the memory along with it. At the very least, Hannibal didn't bring the incident up. Will's eyebrows knitted together when he saw an expensive five-star hotel coming up, rather than the cheap one he had been staying at.

"This... is not..."

"This was much closer," Hannibal replied, pulling over. "The hotel you were previously staying at was much farther. Besides, you are in desperate need of sleep and good food."

"But, I don't have the money—"

"No need. The expenses will be covered by me."

Will couldn't wrap his head around the mere idea of generosity because he never had even a morsel of it his entire life. So it was hard to digest. "No... I can't impose..."

"You did no such thing." Hannibal removed his seatbelt and looked at him. "I insist."

He stepped out of the car and went around to open the door for Will, and as much as Will wanted to handle himself, his stumbling gait wasn't too convincing. Hannibal bound his strong arms around him and put Will's arms around his shoulder, leading him into the hotel. The place was way too ostentatious for Will's taste but all he wanted was to sink into a soft, warm bed right now and banish all thoughts of what happened at the party. Even if it was only for the night.

The whole place seemed to be spinning. Will blinked a couple of times, thankful to Hannibal handling his weight. He was relieved to reach the hotel room, and drop on the bed. He sank into the soft, warm mattress, humming in delight.

Hannibal held Will's shoe with his gloved hands, sliding it off his foot and dropping it to the floor, before removing his sock. Will watched him out of heavy-lidded, inebriated eyes, wanting to stop him but not having the energy.

"Get some sleep, Will," Hannibal headed for the door.

Will's thought process was in shambles at this point, and the thing he needed the most was to be left alone to rest. It was the right thing. The last thing he needed was for the doctor to be there. He wanted things to be professional, right? Granted that the kiss went against all the boundaries he put up, but still, he didn't want things to progress. Except... he still felt Hannibal's warmth while he was being held by him. And before he could hold himself back, the word slipped out of his mouth in a mumble.

"Stay."

Hannibal paused by the door, his dark eyes lifting, glimmering with something... unreadable. But his gaze softened when he looked back at Will, as if he was putting up a polite facade.

"It wouldn't be a good idea," he said, knowing fully well Will would go against it.

"Whatever happened at the fucking party wasn't a good idea," Will rubbed his eyes. "I need someone to keep me in my senses. Just... stay."

Hannibal's lips curved up just a bit. "Very well."

An unmistakable truth hung in the atmosphere: that this was indeed a bad idea. Both men were aware of it too, except the only difference was that Hannibal did not care about it, and although Will wanted to care, he wasn't thinking clearly enough.

He had absolutely no idea the catastrophe he was getting himself into.

End Notes

If you liked the fic, please do leave a comment or kudos, and share so others can find it. It would help a lot 🙏❤️

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!